

Kuwait

Facts and Statistics

Location: Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iraq and Saudi Arabia

Capital: Kuwait City

Population: 2,257,549 including 1,291,354 non-nationals (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7%

Religions: Muslim 85% (Sunni 70%, Shi'a 30%), Christian, Hindu, Parsi, and other 15%

Language in Kuwait

Arabic is the official language of Kuwait, but English is widely spoken. It is used in business and is a compulsory second language in schools. Among the non-Kuwaiti population, many people speak Farsi, the official language of Iran, or Urdu, the official language of Pakistan.

Arabic is spoken by almost 200 million people in more than 22 countries. It is the language of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and of Arab poetry and literature. While spoken Arabic varies from country to country, classical Arabic has remained unchanged for centuries. In Kuwait, there are differences between the dialects spoken in urban areas and those spoken in rural areas.

Kuwaiti Society & Culture

Islam

Islam is practiced by the majority of Kuwaitis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated from what is today Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. Many companies also close on Thursday, making the weekend Thursday and Friday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public.

Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

Although over 95% of the population are Muslim, Kuwait is known for its religious tolerance. The three Churches are allowed to practice freely. Kuwait is the only Gulf Country to establish relations with the Vatican.

Family Values

The extended family is the basis of the social structure and individual identity. It includes the nuclear family, immediate relatives, distant relatives, tribe members, friends, and neighbors.

- . Nepotism is viewed positively, since it guarantees hiring people who can be trusted, which is crucial in a country where working with people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.
- . The family is private. Female relatives are protected from outside influences. It is considered inappropriate to ask questions about a Kuwaiti's wife or other female relatives